

# *Exporting the Nordic children's '68: the global publishing scandal of The Little Red Schoolbook*

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## Exporting the Nordic Children's '68

### The global publishing scandal of *The Little Red Schoolbook*

*Abstract:* The Little Red Schoolbook (1969) was one of the most well-travelled media products for children from '68 aimed at children, and it was certainly the most notorious. Over the course of a few years (1970–2) it was translated and published in Belgium, Finland, France, Great Britain, the Federal Republic of Germany, Greece, Iceland, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland. It also circulated freely in Austria and Luxembourg, and reached beyond Europe to countries including Australia, Japan and Mexico. It led to an obscenity trial in Great Britain, nearly toppled the Australian government, and caused a global publishing scandal. This essay therefore looks at the Scandinavian children's '68 in its international context, via a transnational, comparative analysis of the reception of the LRSB, in order to examine how '68 counterculture and ideas of childhood clashed and converged in the West around 1970. It asks: what can the publishing history of the LRSB tell us about the distinctive features of children's media in Scandinavia at this time?

**Keywords:** *The Little Red Schoolbook*, children's books, sex education, provos, censorship, 1968

### Introduction: Locating children within '68

"You know Mary, you are off to Heaven, while I am going to Hell." So said the British peer Lord Longford to the morality campaigner Mary Whitehouse in August 1971, as she was preparing for a trip to Rome, and he to Copenhagen. Whitehouse was going to show the Danish publication *Den lille røde bog for skoleelever*/*The Little Red Schoolbook*<sup>1</sup> written by Bo Dan Andersen, Søren Hansen and Jesper Jensen to the Pope, while Longford was getting ready for his visit to Copenhagen to research a report on pornography for the British government (Brandreth 247). Whitehouse's campaign against the

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book would play a prominent role in taking it to a notorious obscenity trial, and help cause a global publishing scandal, while the salacious details of Longford's trip and subsequent report would seal the Scandinavian reputation in British eyes as a modern-day Sodom and Gomorrah.

With its Maoist format, slogans and anti-establishment stance, *The Little Red Schoolbook* (henceforth referred to as the *LRSB*) may have adopted much of '68 culture, but, crucially, as a book for school pupils (aged 10 years and upwards in the case of the original Danish edition) it was aimed at a younger audience than is typically understood to have been part of the "youthful" element of the rebellion in current '68 historiography.<sup>2</sup> The observation that '68 formed an important moment in the re-evaluation of ideas of childhood and how children's media should talk to them in the twentieth century is one of the main hypotheses of our international research collaboration, "The Children's '68", upon which this article is based.<sup>3</sup> Historians are increasingly arguing that '68 be seen as a significant stage within the profound social and cultural changes taking place in the so-called "long sixties" (stretching from the second half of the 1950s well into the 1970s, even into the early 1980s according to some studies). Sherman, van Dijk and Alinder suggest this allows us to move beyond what "was beginning to seem like the canonical treatment of the events focused on familiar figures in the Paris-Berkeley axis", to include events, groups, and ideas, or locations and actors that had not previously been included (2). In our research project we argue that the decentring of the '68 years should include children's culture. The very nature of '68, especially as it now generally is understood to have played out in Western Europe and the United States, points to the importance of children and their media, such as the *LRSB*.

One of the key findings of the Children's '68 project was the importance of cultural exchange in spreading radical ideas on childhood across national borders. The *LRSB* was one of the most well-travelled media products for children from the children's '68, and it was certainly the most notorious. Over the course of a few years (1970–2) it was translated and published in Belgium, Finland, France, Great Britain, the Federal Republic of Germany, Greece, Iceland, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland. It also circulated freely in Austria and Luxembourg, and reached beyond Europe to countries including Australia, Japan and Mexico (cf. evidence submitted to "Handyside v. The United Kingdom").

This essay therefore looks at the Scandinavian children's '68 in its international context, via a transnational, comparative analysis

of the reception of the *LRSB*, in order to ask whether the progressive new ideas on children and their culture that characterised '68 in Scandinavia were (or indeed, were not) exported to other Western democracies. We will first analyse the reception of the book in Denmark, Norway and Sweden and then within a broader international context, focusing on its reception in central Europe and France, and the controversy that spread across the English-speaking world, as examples of where the state intervened in very different, but revelatory ways. Using the different editions and translations of the *LRSB*, articles from newspapers<sup>4</sup>, memoirs and court proceedings, the focus of our analysis will be on adults' reception of the book and their conceptualisation of its appropriateness in relation to an intended child reader. We will examine where it caused particular problems, and why there were such striking differences in the book's reception. What can the publishing history of the *LRSB* tell us about the distinctive features of children's media in Scandinavia at this time? Understanding comparative history as a study of the "impact of structures that extend past the boundaries of individual societies" in the past (Conrad 89), we will use the *LRSB* as a way to examine how '68 counterculture and ideas of childhood clashed and converged in the West around 1970.

### *The Little Red Schoolbook*

The original Danish version was 179 pages long, and the same shape, size and colour as Mao Zedong's *Little Red Book* (1964), a comparison further reinforced by its opening salvo, "all grown-ups are paper tigers". Its '68er packaging was designed to appeal to young "wannabe" revolutionaries. In reality, however, the *LRSB* was far from being a Maoist text – indeed, much later, in 2014, one of the authors would admit that the Maoist references had been a "cheap trick" (Hansen qtd. in Moorhead). Rather, at the heart of the project was an impassioned protest against the authoritarian school system "with its robotic discipline" (Hansen 13), which crushed children as individuals. The idea was to speak directly to children and bypass the traditional adult gatekeepers in children's lives, such as parents and educators, by providing children with information on the social structures and mores that shaped their lives, such as the school system, but also sex, drugs and democracy.

The authors were the teachers Bo Dan Andersen, Søren Hansen and the psychologist Jesper Jensen. They were all well-known social "provos" at the time of publishing as they had previously used a

*provoking* style to cause confrontation, similar to the means utilised by the Dutch counterculture provo movement (Petersen & Jensen 86–87). As critics of the school system, they argued for a more pupil-centred education. They were drawing on a long tradition in the Danish school system, which had begun in the interwar period, but grew stronger after World War II and converged with the student rebellion and counterculture in the late 1960s (Gjerløff et al. 20; Andersen & Olsen 284). The book's publisher, Hans Reitzel, shared the authors' progressive views, and was already well known for its provocative books. Founded in 1949 as an alternative to the established publishers, Hans Reitzel had its roots in the Danish tradition of intellectual, socio-cultural critique called "cultural radicalism" (Hertel 6). It had been one of the leaders in the struggle against censorship, publishing semi-pornographic works in the 1950s and the first translation of Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita* outside of France. Hans Reitzel's lists also included key works in philosophy, psychology and education that were read by participants in the student rebellion.

Three out of the book's five sections were dedicated to explaining to pupils how the education system worked, and how they could go about changing it, because "what you get out of education will largely decide what you get out of your whole life. So, you have a right, and a duty to yourself, to insist on getting the best possible education" (Andersen et al. 14). It detailed how pupils could make complaints against teachers, what sort of evidence they would need to collect, who the relevant authorities were, and even provided them with a template letter for lodging an official complaint (59). Exams, grading systems and their abuses were also covered, while the final section looked at pupil representation, concluding with "school and society": "work for change always starts with you. The struggle is carried on by many different people in many different places. But it's the same struggle" (207).

The desire to empower children had a strong tradition in progressive children's media. For example, Jimmy Vulovic has detailed the participatory strategies employed in Swedish children's Communist magazines from the 1920s.<sup>5</sup> However, in the years around '68, the advent of the children's liberation movement shifted the discourse towards a rights-based conceptualization of children and their culture in Sweden (Widhe) and Denmark (H. Jensen, "TV as Children's Spokesman" 106). At its most extreme, the children's liberation movement argued for giving children the vote, abolishing child labour laws, making school optional, and providing sex education for the young (Veerman 133–152). In children's media this also

led to a greater emphasis on anti-censorship, on children's rights to freedom of expression and to self-determination. The *LRSB* adopted this language of rights, and clearly aligned itself with the children's liberation movement and wider liberation movements of the global sixties, for example when it advised pupils they should ignore adults who denied children the right to decide for themselves because they weren't mature enough: "people have said the same thing about Africans, Eskimos, Red Indians, Chinese, etc. You know yourself what this argument is worth" (Andersen et al. 200). The *LRSB* was by no means a straightforward product of the New Left, in spite of its Maoist posturing. It was not seeking to train hearts and minds for a great Socialist revolution (as many leftist critics would complain about at the time, as we will see below). Instead, it aimed to work within the system, helping children to navigate their way in society by providing them with the political tools for claiming their democratic rights. This would eventually lead, they hoped, to a better society.

In this spirit of liberation, the authors also sought to dispel the hypocrisies surrounding sex and drugs, and to address the lack of adequate sex education available to the young. They listed some of the reasons why people go to bed together, what they did, and what the consequences might be. They wrote candidly and without judgement about taboo topics such as pornography, female sexuality and homosexuality. The authors did not hold back in their anger over the lies children were told about sex and their bodies. The advice on masturbation was typically frank: "if anybody tells you it's harmful to masturbate, they're lying" (Andersen et al. 96). They explained to girls who they could turn to if they found themselves pregnant, and what their rights were when dealing with the medical profession: "try not to panic. There are many ways of getting help" (112). On homosexuality, they provided information about the gay liberation movement, with relevant contact details, and added that "their love and feelings are just as real and genuine as anybody else's. [...] The time will come when homosexual marriages are recognised" (105–7). The authors' emphasis on combatting shame with knowledge, and educating children in order to prevent harm or risky behaviour echoed earlier radical and progressive movements' attempts to introduce sex education, influenced by thinkers such as Sigmund Freud and Wilhelm Reich (Reynolds 163–175). However, such progressive initiatives had usually run into problems with obscenity laws. By the late 1960s, at the time of the writing of the *LRSB*, there was a new climate of liberalization of censorship laws, and the so-called "permissive revolution", in which Denmark and other

Scandinavian countries more generally had led the way: famously, Denmark was the first country in the world to legalize pornography in 1969. The tone and approach of the *LRSB* was therefore different to its precursors. Its authors abandoned the strategy of interwar publications, which had tended to adopt the detached voice of the biology lesson to impart sex advice; instead the authors used frank words such as “fuck” (“knæppe” [sic!] in the Danish original), and “cock” (“pik”) and “pussy” (“kusse”), rather than “penis” or “vagina”. By using “the everyday words of the playground” as one English detractor would put it later (qtd. in Limond 529), they were trying to speak directly to their target readership, and avoid the unfamiliar or off-putting language of the scientific manual or the infantilizing, de-sexualised words used in books for preschool children.

## Reception in Denmark, Sweden and Norway

Viewed in isolation, the reception of the *LRSB* in Denmark, Sweden and Norway was a rather straightforward, and unremarkable, success story. The limited provocation it caused (no bans, no morality campaigns) is all the more surprising when compared with the later responses in countries such as France and Great Britain. The first print run of the *LRSB* in Denmark was 15,000 copies and a second run of 10,000 was printed before the first was even released because of the anticipated high sales numbers. By May 1970, the first edition had seen five print runs, a second edition was released in Danish and 100,000 copies of the book had been sold in Denmark, Norway and Sweden, with 65,000 of these sold in Denmark alone. The marketing of the book chiefly consisted of a series of increasingly sensational stories about its alleged contents in the Danish press in the months leading up to its publication. These press stories built up interest, and no doubt helped to boost initial sales.

The first mention of the *LRSB* in the press came in February 1969, when Hans Reitzel received a grant of 10,000 DKK from the PH-foundation to support the publication of the *LRSB* and a sex education book (“PH-pris”). This foundation was named after one of the key thinkers in the Danish “cultural radicalism” movement, the architect and cultural critic Poul Henningsen (1894–1967), who was known for his sharp critique of cultural conservatism in the inter- and post-war period. The awarding of the grant and revelation of the title of the planned book raised no concern in the press. In fact, the project slotted well into a well-established movement that only raised a few eyebrows in Denmark.



The most effective publicity for the *LRSB* came in March 1969 when *Peberkværnen* [Pepper Mill], a television programme for Danish teenagers, ran a segment on the forthcoming book, thereby launching its dangerous reputation. Klaus Petersen and Per Jensen have documented the ambiguity surrounding the role the authors played in the production of the programme (87–88). Whether it was a deliberate publicity stunt or not, the *Peberkværnen* piece helped promote the idea that the upcoming publication was highly dangerous, and it provoked a debate in the national and regional press. The programme's reporter read from an alleged draft of the book, in which the authors recommended pupils who wanted their teacher fired to lure them into having sex, as conviction for sex with a minor would ensure they could never teach again (Vemmer 120). Unsurprisingly, the broadcaster received numerous complaints over the clip, and it attracted the attention of the daily newspapers. The authors never denied having written the offending passage, but it was not included in the published edition, and they claimed that had never been their intention. In fact, at the time they protested their innocence, saying they were even considering suing the broadcaster for slander and copyright infringement (J. Jensen).

Both the *LRSB* and the producers of *Peberkværnen* subscribed to a liberationist discourse on childhood. Indeed, *Peberkværnen* and the Danish Broadcasting Service's Children and Youth department had already been subject to serious attacks in the press for their anti-authoritarian, liberationist programmes (Vemmer 118–129). *Peberkværnen* was a pioneering programme due to its controversial blend of factual reporting and critical social satire. Prior to the report on the *LRSB*, the programme had criticised the Danish royalty, discussed marijuana and hard drugs, sex education, and reported on demonstrations against the Vietnam War. Seen in this light, reading aloud from the most sensationalist pages in a draft from the *LRSB* was just one more provocation amongst many others. It is difficult to say whether the complainants were objecting to the *LRSB* specifically, or using it to attack the programme more generally.

The third appearance of the book in the media before its publication came in late March. This time a stir was caused by the typesetters at the printer Modersmålet. They refused to typeset and print the book, which they found to be obscene ("Trykkeri nægter"). Hans Reitzel then had to find another printer, but in the meantime the newspaper *Dannevirke*, which owned Modersmålet, chose to print some of the pages from the book. These were from the section on how to challenge teachers' authority. The content of these pages was

not discussed much in other newspapers, who were more interested in Hans Reitzel suing Modersmålet/*Dannevirke* for copyright infringement, a crime for which the editor in chief was convicted on 5 November 1969.

When the book was finally released in May 1969, the reviews were mixed, and several critics were rather disappointed by the tameness of the final product after the media hype. The centre-left newspaper *Politiken* found it “sensible”, the centre-right *Berlingske Tidende* “informative” while the right wing *Jyllands-Posten* called it “boring and moralistic” (“Den lille røde får blandet modtagelse”). These mixed opinions were echoed in the regional newspapers. After the reviews had been published, interest in the book died down, at least in the Danish press. Further mention in the Danish press later in 1969 and 1970 was limited to the success of the book in terms of print run numbers and interest abroad.

Similarly, the book did not cause much provocation on its publication in Sweden. There was no talk of any attempt to ban the book and no public debate. A few articles were published in May and June 1969 featuring short reports on the content, and though one referred to the *Peberkværnen* episode, there was no moral outcry or concerned follow-up (“Ligg med läraren”). The Swedish translation was published in late 1969 by the publisher Bokförlaget Prisma and it was reviewed in a handful of articles in the big nationwide newspapers (“Danmarks ‘lilla röda’”; “Elevernas ‘lilla röda’”; “Röda råd”). The reviews were rather matter-of-fact, and although a few adopted a mocking tone, others were positive. In the same year, the Swedish publishing market for children featured child liberationist, Maoist-inspired titles such as Frances Vestins’ childcare book *Handbok i barnindoktrinering* [Manual of child indoctrination], which advocated teaching children to disobey authority, and *När barnen tog makten* [When the kids seized power], by Gunnar Ohrlander and Helena Henschen (Widhe). Moreover, the previous year had seen an important debate about the politicisation of children’s culture (H. Jensen, *Superman to Social Realism* 77–81). In this context, it is no surprise that the Swedes just shrugged their shoulders at the *LRSB*. It was simply yet another provocative book about children and society.

The first national market to respond seriously to the book’s aim to spark debate was Norway. The *LRSB* was published in October 1969 by Pax, a left-leaning publisher. In a short article in the newspaper *Arbeiderbladet* from 21 October 1969, the publisher’s interest in translating the book was explicitly linked to its provocative nature. Its publication was announced at a small celebration of Pax’s fifth

anniversary. At the event an MP from the Christian People's Party voiced a protest ("Den lille røde bok"). The head of the party sent a formal notice to the Public Prosecutor (Rigsadvokaten) on 25 October stating he wanted the printing of the book stopped because it would undermine the didactic and moral basis of the school system ("Krig mot boka"). This did not happen, as the other parties did not want to restrict freedom of speech in order to ban the book ("Kristelig folkeparti"). Although other MPs stated that they disliked most of the book, they welcomed it as an opportunity to discuss the Norwegian school system in an open and direct way (ibid.).

The somewhat "low key" reception of the *LRSB* in Scandinavia must be understood in the context of the "long '68" of Scandinavian children's culture. This period began in the mid 1960s with a series of heated debates that shook the world of Scandinavian children's literature, as a new generation of authors, critics, publishers and literature scholars challenged past norms regarding aesthetics and the content of children's books. The discussions of new ideals for children's literature were articulated in a critique of *all* children's media in Gunila Ambjörnsson's *Skräpkultur åt barnen* [Trash culture for children] in 1968. And in the first week of December 1969, the Nordic Council held The Children & Culture symposium at Hässleby castle due to public debate over Ambjörnsson's book and children's media culture in Scandinavia (H. Jensen, *Superman to Social Realism* 84). The *LRSB* can be seen as both an outcome of, as well as an addition to, this uproar as its attempt to speak directly to children and desire to empower them was one of the important new ideas to emerge from these debates.

## International reception

The radical nature of these ideas, that had become common currency in Scandinavian children's media circles, becomes apparent when we look at the international reception of the *LRSB*. As the book was translated and exported beyond Scandinavia, negative reactions began to multiply. It spread quickly across the European continent and into the English-speaking world, picked up by radical leftist publishers. Distribution was then assured by the militant youth and school organisations, as well as the alternative education and children's rights organisations that flourished in the '68 years. This section will show how the motivations for publishing the book were multiple, and often locally-driven, but most of the publishers appeared to have shared a political involvement in the protests of the '68 era, and an

interest in the revival of progressive education and liberationist ideas on childhood.

The first translations beyond Scandinavia appeared in the summer of 1970, mainly in central Europe. While there was a certain amount of outcry, overall the response of the authorities was measured, and the book circulated mostly unhindered. In German-speaking Switzerland the politician and director of schools, Hans Martin Sutermeister, called for the book to be banned. Consequently, several schools forbade its circulation, and bookshops refused to stock it. Several cantons in French-speaking Switzerland followed suit, introducing bans and imprisoning several teachers for reading it with their pupils. Still, the Swiss federal government decided that a national ban would only increase the *LRSB*'s notoriety, and enhance its appeal in the eyes of its target readership. One enterprising Swiss publisher in the Vaud tried to circumvent this disappointing lack of national condemnation by covering it in a wrapper that warned the book "was for readers aged over 18 years only" (Newell). The West German edition, also from 1970, fared better at generating heat as well as light, perhaps because its publisher was a key '68 era organisation, and had an ideological interest in the project. It was published by the Verlag Neue Kritik, which had been founded by the Sozialistische Deutsche Studentenbund [Socialist German student league] in 1965.<sup>6</sup> The translators Peter Jacobi and Lutz Meier were teachers, and they added sections relevant to the German education system, such as the recommendation that school pupils should not have to stand up when their teacher entered the classroom. Neue Kritik was a good example of a '68 era radical publisher keen to spread new, liberationist ideas on childhood. A year earlier, it had published the German translation of another liberationist Danish book for children from Hans Reitzel, *Dreng og pige – mand og kvinde, Moderne sexorientering for unge* [Boy Girl Man Woman: Intelligent Guide to Sex Education for Young People] by Bent H. Claesson. The German-language *LRSB* went into eight editions in three years, and over 180,000 copies were distributed nationwide.

The second wave of translations came in early 1971, and this was when the book became the subject of a global publishing scandal. By this time, its incendiary reputation had been building. When the English-language edition of the book appeared, the British press already knew what to expect. The *Times Educational Supplement* described it as a "midget with a mighty kick", that was "likely to cause controversy out of all proportion to its size, if one can judge by the reception of similar editions in other European countries" (Newell). Moreover,

the moral order was retaliating with force in countries such as France and Great Britain in response to the “events” of ‘68 and the climate of sexual permissiveness of the high sixties. The *LRSB* was brandished by government ministers, ecclesiastical authorities and conservative campaigners as further evidence of the moral decay of contemporary society.

In France, the *LRSB* arrived just a few years after May ‘68, which, Richard Vinen argues was a “unique drama” compared to many other Western countries’ experience of ‘68 (and certainly very different to the Scandinavian ‘68), “when demonstrations involved tens or even hundreds of thousands of people, and when almost ten million workers went on strike” (xv). The French reading of the book therefore focused on its political and anti-authoritarian aspects. A ruling of 3 March 1971 by the Minister of the Interior, Raymond Marcellin, pronounced that the book represented a threat to public order, and banned the French-language Swiss edition from crossing the border into France (“Petit livre rouge des écoliers est interdite en France”). Thus, even before his edition of the *LRSB* had gone to print, the French publisher, François Maspero, had become embroiled in a battle of wills with the state. As a direct challenge to this ruling, Maspero went ahead with the production of his edition of the Swiss text, printing 10,000 copies in March 1971. Marcellin responded with a second ruling on 17 April 1971, this time reiterating the ban, and adding that it included “all new editions, regardless of the language or publisher”. A series of raids were then carried out on bookshops in Paris, a handful of copies of the book were seized, and the publisher and booksellers taken to court. Maspero was sentenced to two months in prison and a fine of 18,000 F. However, advertisements for the book still appeared in Maspero’s catalogue, as well as in the venerable *Bibliographie de la France*, the official trade publication that listed all books published in France, and in both cases the book was featured with the indication “Banned”. Two years later, both Maspero and the editor of the *Bibliographie* would be taken to court, and charged with intent to sell a banned publication (“Publicité ou mise en vente?”).

In the context of the inevitable censorship of the book, distribution strategies were crucial. We can see this thinking in a series of articles on the book printed in *Rouge* [Red] magazine, published by the Jeunesse Communiste Revolutionnaire [Revolutionary Communist youth], a Trotskyite organisation that had played a prominent role in May ‘68. The first article, dating from January 1971, explained they would be stocking the *LRSB* in their bookshops because the ideas

on pedagogy were interesting, and that much of the information on advice and support was useful and would be hard to find elsewhere. This way, young revolutionaries would therefore know where they could get their hands on copies of the book. The review was not wholeheartedly positive however: they lambasted the Danish authors for writing a negative, pseudo-revolutionary manual, whose real aim was for children and teachers to get on better, rather than true revolution. In March, the same magazine denounced the government for banning the book, and stated the book would continue to circulate, one way or another, in schools. Maspero published both articles in his edition of the *LRSB*, possibly to indicate to militants how to access more copies, and undoubtedly as a statement on government censorship.

This confrontation was characteristic of the notorious “Marcellin years” (1968–74), when the Minister of the Interior, Raymond Marcellin, spearheaded a repression of the public sphere in the wake of May ‘68. His ministry intervened directly to carry out censorship of the press, books, theatre and arts (Rajsfus). Maspero was the most prominent new leftist publisher in France in this period. He was always at the frontline of revolutionary publishing, and anti-censorship rows, particularly with Marcellin (Hage 93–160). Books from his radical thinkers’ paperback series were the fashionable accessory for student rebels on campuses in French-speaking countries. It was in this iconic series that he published the *LRSB* – alongside Mao Zedong, Che Guevara, and Frantz Fanon. Although, according to Julien Hage, Maspero was “personally” very committed to popular education (103), he did not use the *LRSB* to explore specifically French issues in schools and power structures. Rather than adapting the text to its new context, he simply transposed the Swiss translation into his series. The timing here would suggest that he had principally been attracted to publishing the title as an act of provocation against Marcellin. The French edition of the *LRSB* became a key element in Maspero’s ferocious “fight to the death” with Marcellin over censorship (“Une lettre de M. François Maspero”).

By way of contrast, the British publisher was particularly interested in the *LRSB* for its perspective on school and childhood, which resonated in this period when the children’s rights movement in Great Britain was at its peak (on this, and its subsequent implosion after 1971, see Thomson 200–6). The publisher’s name, Stage One, was a reference to the idea that revolution “comes in stages”, and the first stage was education (Newell). It was unusual – and arguably went further than the Danish text – in its involvement of schoolchildren in



the adaptation process. Two teachers, three pupils and the publisher worked together, going through the text "line by line", to make the book speak to British problems, and ensure that children had information about charities and services which could help them. Finally, they changed the tone of the book. According to Roger, one of the pupils involved in the rewrite, they felt that the original Danish text placed too much emphasis on the divisions between adults and children: "we've tried to show children that they have some allies among adults" (Newell). Their overall goal in publishing the book was to "help to increase the self-confidence of children – particularly working-class children. They should feel that if they don't like the system it's not because they are wrong, but because schools and the system are not catering for them properly" (Newell). The team included the future Labour MP Hilary Benn, son of the Labour politician Tony Benn and education reform campaigner Caroline Benn, at the time a pupil at Holland Park Comprehensive, a progressive London school well-known for its radicalism. Free copies of the book were distributed in schools by organisations such as the Schools Action Union. The publisher was clearly well-connected with the British radical education movement of the period.

When the review copies were circulated in March 1971, the British press and morality campaigners pounced. Chief among the campaigners was Mary Whitehouse, who called for the Director of Public Prosecutions to act. Under the Obscene Publications Act, police went to search the publisher's premises, twice. They seized copies of the book, as well as publicity material. However, as Richard Handyside explained in a later interview, the officers of the law failed to find the bulk of the stock. That night, he and his friends managed to secrete thousands of copies of the books in their homes to avoid seizure by the police, who inevitably returned the next day (Robertson 92). According to evidence submitted to the European Court of Human Rights "18,800 copies of a total print of 20,000 copies were missed and subsequently sold, for example, to schools which had placed orders." As Handyside recollected, the police raid in fact proved to be excellent publicity: "in the following days, sales naturally boomed, and in fact by a week later, virtually all remaining copies had been sold." (Robertson 92).

Unlike the French case, it was the sexual content that upset the British establishment. While the British had not experienced anything akin to the events of May '68, the years around '68 did witness fierce struggles between the state and morality campaigners on one side, and on the other an alternative culture that incorporated new

visions of the family, sexuality, school and children's rights. These struggles were often fought in court in a series of sensational trials (Sutherland 1-9 and 111-16; Buckingham). The timing of the publication of the book, given its content and its Danish origins, proved particularly inflammatory. The *LRSB* became a protagonist at the peak of this conflict, as its publication and subsequent trial coincided with the media circus surrounding the trial of the counterculture magazine *Oz*, and Lord Longford's visit to Copenhagen to write his report on pornography. The *LRSB* and the "Schoolkids" *Oz* issue went to trial at the same time, over the summer of 1971, when both were defended by John Mortimer, QC. They had both been attacked by morality campaigns led by Mary Whitehouse, and the smutty details of both trials caught the imagination of the press. As Paul Johnson observed in the wake of the *LRSB* trial, "the public has got it into their heads that it is a sex manual for kids". While there were certainly key differences between the two publications, it was the similarities that proved crucial. *Oz* was an adult underground magazine, whose editors had sought to rejuvenate their image by recruiting teenagers to edit a special issue, which the editor in chief Richard Neville then deliberately sexed up to cause a sensation (Buckingham). Stage One's edition of the *LRSB* was a rather serious-minded little tome, that was genuinely concerned to work in the interests of school children. Nevertheless, both publications spoke to current campaigns for children's rights (Buckingham). And the tender age of their readership was the crucial detail in the cases of the "Schoolkids" *Oz* issue and the *LRSB*, which made the two publications particularly controversial. Mary Whitehouse observed that "we can be grateful to the publishers of the *LRSB* for one thing. They have demonstrated in no uncertain terms just how vulnerable are the young at the hands of those who preach 'freedom' but advocate licence" (letter to *The Spectator*).

The *LRSB* was declared obscene by the English court on 1st July 1971 (confusingly, a trial in Edinburgh came to the opposite conclusion). Henceforth it was only allowed to circulate in an expurgated version. The publisher only changed a few sections in the chapter on sex, and used it as an opportunity to lay bare the incoherence of the obscenity charges. The introduction to the revised edition explained they had not received any guidance on how to adapt the text, so they had to do it based on guesswork, with lawyers (10-11). They added explanations about the legal age of consent, removed a discussion of oral sex, and the advice to girls to carry condoms in case the boy didn't have one, while cutting the exhortation to schools to install



contraceptive dispensing machines, and for students to set up their own distribution service if the school refused to comply. The suggestion that you might get good ideas from pornography was also excised. The first print run exceeded 100,000 copies, as the trial and media attention had raised its profile significantly (Sutherland 114).

The English-speaking world, led by the British, helped to create an international publishing scandal around the *LRSB*. This was, in no small measure, thanks to the work of the formidable teacher-turned-media morality campaigner Mary Whitehouse. For over 30 years Whitehouse was, as Ben Thompson puts it, “a byword for affronted decency” (1), and a savvy media star. Thompson records how she travelled far and wide in the course of her career, meeting and inspiring like-minded groups. Crucially, Whitehouse had conceived a particular hatred for Denmark, following a visit to Copenhagen in 1970, at the behest of a news program (Thompson 276–7). The trip had opened her eyes to the murky world of hardcore pornography, which she vowed to fight henceforth. Thus it was that the *LRSB* was doubly guilty in her eyes, for targeting children, and for its sulphurous provenance. She spared no energy in seeking its destruction. Her efforts had to be on an international scale, as the book was crossing borders swiftly, which, as we have seen, helped it elude the censors. Whitehouse took the *LRSB* to the Pope, who denounced it as sacrilegious (Brandreth 247). She also urged sister organisations in other countries to be vigilant, notably in Australia, where they had set up their own “festival of light” inspired by Whitehouse: a religious grassroots campaigning movement against the permissive society of the high sixties. The following year, after its decision in April 1972 to allow the book to be distributed, the Australian government was nearly toppled, as an angry public turned on Don Chipp, the Minister for Customs and Excise (“The Book that Shook the World”). Once again, the young readership was the key issue: the cabinet discussion raised the question of whether material for children should be subject to special import regulations. The decision not to ban it was based on the premise that such measures would be futile since the book was already in print in Australia. Their main concern was instead to prevent its distribution in schools.<sup>7</sup>

It was for Europe as a whole, however, that the scandal over the *LRSB* had the most serious repercussions. The English publisher Richard Handyside took his case to the European Court of Human Rights in 1976, after the UK court decision. In a landmark decision, the European court upheld the UK court’s ruling (“Handyside v. The United Kingdom”). This was based in part on the fact that the book was aimed at children, and accessible to even very young children:

The Court attaches particular importance to [...] the intended readership of the Schoolbook. It was aimed above all at children and adolescents aged from twelve to eighteen. Being direct, factual and reduced to essentials in style, it was easily within the comprehension of even the youngest of such readers. [...] it also included, above all in the section on sex and in the passage headed "Be yourself" in the chapter on pupils [...], sentences or paragraphs that young people at a critical stage of their development could have interpreted as an encouragement to indulge in precocious activities harmful for them or even to commit certain criminal offences. ("Handyside v. The United Kingdom" 20)

Moreover, "there were numerous passages that it found to be subversive, not only to the authority but to the influence of the trust between children and teachers" ("Handyside v. The United Kingdom" 10). The European court ruled therefore that each state had the right to decide for itself, within certain limits, on the moral protection of its citizens. According to Helen Fenwick, a specialist in human rights law, this was one of the court's most important decisions, for it set a precedent that has been used many times since in freedom of speech cases dealing with protection of morals or religious sensibility (Jenkins).

## Conclusion

In Scandinavia, the *LRSB* was only one of many attacks aimed at the old establishment. It was part of a change in attitudes in children's media institutions where children's right to their own opinion, to have their interests heard and taken seriously was at the centre (if only as an abstract ideal). The Nordic Council was receptive towards this change, just as national institutions in Scandinavia generally have been characterized as receptive towards the ideas introduced by the '68 counter culture. In Denmark, for instance, it was the aim of the Children and Youth department at the public broadcaster to be the "children's spokesperson" (H. Jensen, "TV as Children's Spokesman" 105). And when this stance and the progressive programs it produced were criticised, they were defended by the Conservative MP (and later prime minister) Poul Schlüter (H. Jensen, "Scandinavian Children's Television"). It was also under a Conservative-led government coalition that the law which banned picture pornography in Denmark in 1969 was abolished. Consequently, when Norwegian MPs took the *LRSB* as a chance to debate the Norwegian school system and its failures, this was in fact a very Scandinavian response to

the *LRSB*'s counterculture-inspired provocation. It was not the first instance where children were spoken to directly about things that previously had been seen as part of the "adult sphere".

The international reception of the *LRSB* tells a very different story. The idea of informing children in order to empower them, considered progressive in countries such as Denmark and Sweden, and tolerable in Norway, was interpreted as dangerous and morally dubious in France and Great Britain, particularly when it came to sex education. In the wake of the events of '68 in France, the government was intent on banning cultural products that incited revolt. The *LRSB* fell foul of this climate, and was in fact used by its French publisher in his struggle against censorship. For the British, and then subsequently the Australians, the material dealing with sex posed the main problem. It was perceived to be clear evidence that the counterculture and permissive society of the period was intent on corrupting the innocent. The international publishing scandal generated by the *LRSB* reminds us that the campaigners for so-called "traditional" morals, and the reaction against '68, were also highly organised, and on a transnational scale. However, before we conclude that this was detrimental to the *LRSB*'s intentions, we should note that the censorship often failed to prevent distribution, and usually ended up boosting sales. In fact, the many attempts to have it banned helped to seal the *LRSB*'s reputation as a dangerous '68er text. The media circus surrounding the *LRSB* was central to the project: it was part of the authors' provo ethos, and was then often part of its appeal for the publishers who spread it across the West.

Finally, the decision by the European Court of Human Rights sheds light on the key question of the *LRSB* scandal – the young age of its target readership. The whole episode suggests the idea of childhood was a final frontier in the cultural and political rebellions of the '68 years. For a school of thought in '68, often to be found amongst new left thinkers, childhood and education had to be emancipated from the grip of the military-industrial complex. But just as children were an important symbol for '68ers representing the hope for a new society, they were also a crucial group for the morality campaigners: they were the last innocent bastion in a crumbling world. To Mary Whitehouse and her counterparts elsewhere, children needed to be protected to prevent complete moral decay. The *LRSB* scandal broke with this ideal, as its key idea was to make children critically aware, to emancipate them through information and thereby improve society. The connection between the child and dreams of an improved society made the stakes very high on both sides.

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## Notes

1 As it is an international publication, we will refer to the book by its English title. Unless otherwise stated, all quotations are taken from the English revised edition published by Stage One in 1971. In the cases where this edition differs from the Danish version, or the uncensored version, we have noted this. However, for all other publications (such as newspaper titles) to ensure that it is clear which country is being discussed, we will use the original language title, with a translation provided in brackets. All translations are by the authors, unless otherwise indicated.

2 On the “youth” element of the Scandinavian youth rebellion, see Tor Egil Førland, “Introduction to the Special Issue on 1968,” *Scandinavian Journal of History*, vol. 33, no. 4, 2008; for a comparative analysis of youth protest culture in the “long sixties”, see Arthur Marwick, *The Sixties: Cultural Revolution in Britain, France, Italy and the United States, c. 1958–c. 1974*, Oxford and New York, Oxford University Press, 1998, pp. 41-111.

3 See *The Children's '68* (<https://children68.hypotheses.org/>) and also Cécile Boulaire & Sophie Heywood, *Le '68 des enfants/The Children's '68*, special issue of *Strenæ: Recherches sur les livres et objets culturels de l'enfance*, vol. 13, 2018. For a long view on changing ideas of childhood in the West, and the key role of the twentieth century as “the century of the child”, see Paula S. Fass, “Is There a Story in the History of Childhood?”, *The Routledge History of Childhood in the Western World*, Abingdon, Routledge, 2013, pp. 1-14.

4 We conducted systematic searches in digitised newspapers available from the main countries selected for focus. Systematic searches were conducted using keywords consisting of the names of the *LRSB*'s authors, the title of the *LRSB* in the respective translations, translators' names, names of publishing houses as well as the names of well-known critics. All references are to the digitised versions of the newspapers.

5 Such participatory strategies were by no means exclusive to the left. Religious missionary organizations in the nineteenth century, to cite one example, also encouraged children to write to their magazines, to lead collections of money for the missions, and so forth. See Sophie Heywood “Missionary Children: The French Holy Childhood Association in European context, 1843-c.1914”, *European History Quarterly*, vol. 45, no. 3, 2015, pp. 446-466.

6 The authors would like to thank Bettina Kümmerling-Meibauer for providing them with information on the German reception of the book.

7 See the confidential cabinet minute: <http://vrroom.naa.gov.au/print/?ID=25377>